

By Rep. Dan Lungren, 3rd District (2/15/10)

In 2000, Wayne Corliss began traveling to Thailand as a "child sex tourist" to take advantage of young children - and lenient child abuse laws.

Corliss was finally convicted and sentenced in 2009, after an extensive international investigation found that he had preyed on children as young as 4 years old.

Although Corliss was a serial pedophile and a registered sex offender in his hometown, he still managed to get a part-time job as a department store Santa. Those who knew him described him as friendly, witty, and "the best Santa Claus anyone has ever seen." He could have been my neighbor - or yours.

The U.S. is home to more than 700,000 registered sex offenders. California alone has over 117,000 offenders on its registry - more than twice the number of any other state.

The Sacramento area has the unfortunate distinction of being among the top five areas in the nation for child prostitution. Our convergence of interstate highways and large immigrant population has made us a leading destination for sex traffickers. This illicit and reprehensible activity happens right in our own communities, even on our own streets.

Our region, known for its meandering rivers, forested foothills and friendly neighbors, harbors within its shadows, some of the most vicious of criminals - those who prey on innocent and defenseless children.

On Feb. 17, I will be hosting a meeting of law enforcement officials, community leaders, and those who work with victims of human trafficking, to discuss this plague on our region and our nation.

I have invited Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan of the Mexican Foreign Ministry to explore some measures we can take in collaboration with the Mexican government to curb the flow of human victims trafficked in and out of the nation.

We will also hear from Agent Dave Meadows from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, as well as Sacramento Sheriff John McGinness and Truckee Police Chief Nicholas Sensley, who started the first human trafficking task force in 2001. Our focus will be the protection of women and children from sex traffickers and child sex tourism.

While serving as Attorney General of California, I worked to ensure passage of Megan's Law, which requires California's convicted sex offenders to register on a public database. I am currently working on an International Megan's Law, which will track the foreign travel of high-risk sex offenders and alert the appropriate officials in the destination cities of such offenders. This will allow us to stop predators like Wayne Corliss before they do irreparable damage to children anywhere in the world.

But more needs to be done. As we meet with local and international leaders in anti-trafficking efforts, we will talk openly about the types of measures that have been effective and what tools and resources are needed to ensure that women and children are protected from exploitation. By working together, we can keep sex traffickers off of our streets, out of our communities, and away from our children.

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